

Two-screen Phoenix opens to filmgoers



It's a wrap: New seating is fitted in the main auditorium on the day it arrives, left, and the new second screen ready to welcome its first filmgoers. Photos Mike Coles

By John Lawrence

The Phoenix Cinema in East Finchley reopened its doors to film fans last month with a fully refurbished main auditorium and a whole new second screen. The return of screenings in mid-December was the culmination of a £500,000 eight-week rebuilding project designed to give the 113-year-old venue the best possible future at a time when all cinemas are facing tough challenges.

Audiences poured back into the main screen on Wednesday 18 December to watch the Oscar-tipped film *Conclave*, starring Ralph Fiennes and Stanley Tucci. They had all-new seating with extra legroom and a much-improved 7.1 surround sound system to enjoy.

At the same time, the second screen was showing *Van Gogh: Poets and Lovers* in the upstairs space that used to be occupied by the café but that is now a plush mini-auditorium housing 22 high-back seats with excellent sight lines to the 2 metre screen.

Team work

Alison Gold, outgoing chair

of the Phoenix Cinema Trust, praised the work of everyone involved in the transformation project, saying it was teamwork at its best. "East Finchley is a great place and the Phoenix is now an even greater part of it," she said.

First reactions to the 174 new red and yellow seats in the main auditorium were positive. They were shipped over from a Malaysian manufacturer and fitted in a single day by contractors Maeve, who were responsible for all the work on both screens.

"We have premium seating and 11 sofa seats plus accessible seating. The rows are more

spaced out so there is more room for everyone. This will bring a whole new level of comfort to the Phoenix experience," said executive director Rob Kenny.

Ticket prices

Much of the cost of the project has been funded by the sale of the little-used car park at the rear of the cinema in Fairlawn Avenue. Nevertheless, standard ticket prices will rise by a pound from £13 to £14, with premium seats at £16, to make sure the cinema can continue to cover its costs.

Coffers were boosted by the sale of 152 of the old seats in November. Supporters came along to collect them in return for a £20 donation per seat. Among them was Phoenix fan Reece Shearsmith, co-creator with Steve Pemberton of the acclaimed BBC TV series *Inside No 9*, who appropriately took away nine. The Phoenix trustees and staff also hope that the new second screen will be popular for private hires. People will be able to reserve the auditorium for themselves and a group of family or friends to show the film of their choice, and with a dedicated food and drink service while they are in their seats.



Team work: Outgoing Phoenix Cinema Trust chair Alison Gold with executive director Rob Kenny in the second screen. Photo Mike Coles

Town Team wants ideas

East Finchley Town Team are getting the New Year off to a sociable start with an open meeting at East Finchley Constitutional Club, The Walks, N2, on Thursday 9 January from 7pm.

Everyone is welcome to the informal event, where there will be nibbles and low-priced drinks, and a chance to let the team know what are the key issues in East Finchley that they should be tackling in 2025. East Finchley Town Team is a collective of representatives from East Finchley Community Trust, East Finchley Open Artists, *The Archer* newspaper and the Phoenix Cinema, supported by East Finchley's local councillors and established to promote and support the N2 High Road. Find out more or send your suggestions to eftownteam@gmail.com

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